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THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG IN OUR CIVIL WAR.

BY AN OLD SOLDIER.

From the Advocate of Peace, September, 1903.

Looking back upon four years of continuous soldier life, recalling its intermingled lights and shadows, its triumphs and disasters, inspiring battle scenes and humiliating corpse-strewn fields, beautiful parades and hideous prison pens, glorious deaths and heart-breaking funerals, large charities and bitter agonies, redeeming heroisms and savage horrors, keen delights and immedicable wounds, freed slaves and maddened masters, union, peace and law restored with unspeakable losses of treasure, love and life,—pondering all these, and recurring to first principles, one whose immediate ancestors were members of the Society of Friends is quite likely to find himself reverting more and more to their anti-war tenets, and to conclude that in the great conflict both North and South were in the wrong.

ATTITUDE OF NATIONS TOWARD ONE ANOTHER.

As to the proper attitude in general of one nation towards another, Milton's theory would universally be recognized as correct: "Ah, sir, a commonwealth ought to be but as one huge Christian personage, one mighty growth and stature of an honest man, as big and compact in virtue as in body!" For the special business of a warrior, perhaps we should accept the rule laid down by John the Baptist when soldiers asked him, "What shall we do?" and he answered, "Do violence to no man." If that reply be not preposterous, it must mean, "You may ward off a blow, but you should never unnecessarily strike one." For the behavior of one who has been wronged, shall we not respect the view of Socrates: "We must not retaliate, nor render evil for evil." (Plato's "Crito," 49.) For the Anglo-Saxon's disdainful bearing toward what he deems inferior races,

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is not Paul's doctrine at once a corrective and a sharp reproof: "God hath made of one blood all nations of men"? And ought we not to find a perpetual solvent and transformer of all hateful elements in the spirit of him who enjoined, "Love your enemies," and who, on a memorable occasion, when, if ever, violent assault might seem justifiable, commanded, "Put up again thy sword into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"?

Lord Bacon strongly commends war. He says: "No body can be healthful without exercise; . . . and certainly to a kingdom or estate a just and honorable war is the true exercise." On the 12th of last November, Gen. S. M. B. Young, already, as it seems, the highest officer in our army, wrote for publication these words: "To carry on war, disguise it as we may, is to be cruel; it is to kill and burn, burn and kill, and again kill and burn." To the same effect is Gen. Sherman's oft-quoted remark,* "War is hell." Can an *exercise* that is essentially cruel and hellish be *healthful*?

Except in the German military machine, in that of the French and some others, and among half-civilized peoples, or in the case of a few 'degenerates' and persons of arrested mental and moral development, the time has gone by when disputes between individuals were settled dog-fashion. Personal fighting is now unlawful, and, if it result fatally, is severely punished. But if private mortal combat is felonious, why is not national dueling as much more so as the attempted murder of a hundred or a thousand is worse than that of one?

WAR AS A MEANS OF SECURING JUSTICE.

War is often excused as the only means of securing justice. But does it not invariably perpetrate more injustice than it punishes, prevents, or cures? Does it not always let the most guilty go unscathed, while the most innocent suffer unspeakably? Is it not commonly a mere test of physical strength and satanic skill? Does it ever settle permanently a question of right? With a professedly Christian nation should not the truth be regarded as axiomatic that, except to defend its very life against deadly violence, a nation has no more warrant in the sight of Heaven to lift the sword against a nation than a brother has to wield a club against a brother? Was

* Sherman but echoes John Wesley's "War is the business of Hell. How shall Christians help the Prince of Hell, who was 'a murderer from the beginning,' by telling the world about the 'usefulness and necessity of war'?"

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not Benjamin Franklin nearly right when he declared, "There never was a good war or a bad peace"?

We would not belittle the heroism of one who, at the risk of his life and without malice, strikes a blow, not for fame, but for his home, his country, and the rights of man. We dwell lovingly on the memory of Leonidas, of Winkelried, of Sidney, of Hampden, and of Washington. In the sharp struggle for existence their work seemed absolutely indispensable. Let their glory be undimmed forever. We say with Thomas Francis Meagher, our Irish patriot, when he added to his requested autograph while awaiting sentence of death,

"Whether on the scaffold high
Or in the battle's van,
The fittest place for man to die
Is where he dies for man."

In past ages not only was there generally a plausible excuse for bloody belligerency in that there seemed no honorable alternative, but there was a superstitious belief, often a prayer, that the Almighty would miraculously interpose to give victory to the most devout. Even to-day, with a sort of Louis XI. piety, some nations engaged in unjust warfare keep up that mockery, as if by copious^{*} blandishments the Lord might be coaxed into lending a hand!

AN IMPARTIAL UMPIRE NOW.

There was no impartial umpire then. We have one now. The Hague Tribunal ought soon to end both the bloodshed and the blasphemy. Once recognized as the Supreme Court of the world, with either party to any international dispute at liberty to appeal to it without waiting for the consent of the other; thereupon proceeding in its discretion to take cognizance and jurisdiction of the issue; after due invitation to all concerned, investigating, taking testimony, scrutinizing the facts, weighing the arguments, and then pronouncing an advisory judgment; surely the hasty resort to human slaughter, with its essential savagery and its mocking appeals to Moloch, misnamed God, would soon disappear among peoples claiming to be above the reptile stage in evolution.

Ex officio, such tribunal, or some stated Congress of Nations, might properly formulate definitions and step by step elaborate a code. It might well, for instance, decide when rebellion becomes revolution, and when, if

ever, one government has a right to destroy another by force. There is at times sore need of such judicial or legislative action.

WAS THE CIVIL WAR UNAVOIDABLE?

Take an illustration from our own history.

High authority has recently declared that in our Civil War both North and South were in the right; and we are constantly hearing that the struggle was entirely unavoidable, that it was glorious to all concerned, and that nobody was to blame. Young America's orators now seek to conciliate both sides by simply boasting how big and how brave we are. Too often the moral element is ignored, the vital truth is unrecognized, the mind of the masses is befogged; the public conscience is stupefied; as if the greatest civil war in history had no lesson for us or for the world! It is high time that we open our eyes and do some careful thinking. "Against stupidity the gods are powerless."

LINCOLN ON THE RIGHT OF REVOLUTION.

One whom all now love and honor, by many esteemed our wisest and best president since Washington, had repeatedly asserted in most emphatic terms the right of revolution. On one occasion he spoke as follows:

"Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable, a most sacred right, a right which we hope and believe is to liberate the world. Nor is this right confined to cases in which the whole people of an existing government may choose to exercise it. Any portion of such people that can, may revolutionize and make their own so much of territory as they inhabit."

These are the words of our truly great and justly revered Abraham Lincoln. They express, too, the central doctrine of Jefferson, Madison, and Franklin, and of nearly all American statesmen before our Civil War. They show how our nation and all the Central and South American States sprang into existence as organized republics.

LINCOLN'S ACTION AS PRESIDENT.

But when Mr. Lincoln became President he looked at revolutionary governments from a different standpoint. He had sworn to execute the laws; but a new body politic had suddenly arisen and interposed to prevent. It had followed exactly the process he had clearly outlined and

sanctioned. It distinctly based its action on what he had affirmed to be "a most valuable, a most sacred right." Note the undeniable facts.

On the twentieth of December, 1860, South Carolina, by a unanimous vote of the Convention called by her legislature, passed the ordinance of secession. In less than two months the six Gulf States followed her example. Within three months and before Lincoln's inauguration, the seven seceded States had thrown off the United States government, organized a new one, and declared themselves an independent nation under the title of The Confederate States of America. Within its territorial limits all opposition ceased; unity and enthusiasm prevailed; the Confederate government was equipped, installed, and efficiently at work. No attribute of sovereignty was lacking. A nation had been "born in a day." The Southerners claimed to be aliens. They were terribly in earnest.

President Lincoln's official oath required him to perform what circumstances now rendered both an impossibility and an apparent violation of what he had affirmed to be "a most valuable, a most sacred right." What to do with the new republic was the problem. "All we ask," said President Davis, "is to be let alone." But the whole North demanded action. What policy shall our clear-headed, tender-hearted Lincoln adopt? Consistently with his favorite doctrine, he may advise to recognize the new power, and to enter into diplomatic relations with it in the hope of eventually winning it back; or he may undertake to annihilate its government by force, conquer its people, and re-annex its territory.

Conscientiously he chose the latter course. Immediately the shooting began, and four other States joined the Confederacy.

WERE THE ELEVEN SECEDED STATES A NATION?

Mr. Lincoln denied, and most people at the North have always denied, that the eleven seceded States constituted a nation. But show us a definition that shall not include under that appellation the Confederate States. "The State," says Professor Bluntschli, "is the politically organized people (*Volkperson*) of a particular land." "A nation," says President Woolsey (Introd. to Study of International Law), "is an organized community within a certain territory." Says the Standard Dictionary, "A nation is an organized political community considered

with reference to the persons composing it." Webster's International Dictionary defines it as "the body of the inhabitants of a country, united under an independent government of their own." The Century Dictionary makes it "an organized community inhabiting a certain extent of territory, within which its sovereignty is exercised." The oldest, ablest, and most impartial of living historians, Professor Goldwin Smith, always a strong champion of the North in its conflict with the South, explicitly and repeatedly insists* that the Confederacy was a *bona fide* nation, and that the war was "really international, not civil."

WHAT WAS THE DUTY OF THE GOVERNMENT?

What, then, was the duty of the Washington government?

Guided by its fundamental principles, bearing in mind its own origin, recalling its uniform action in similar cases, and acting in the spirit of Him who is the "Author of Peace and the Lover of Concord," should it not at least have recognized the Richmond government, received its commissioners, and listened to its overtures? Was it not as true then as when our lamented McKinley uttered it in 1898, that "forcible annexation is criminal aggression"? Was it any the less so because the Southern people had always been our associates, friends, kinsfolk? Some nations may seem to have repudiated that doctrine now; but who will say that forty-two years ago every honorable expedient should not have been tried, every fair and kindly concession have been made, and all possible patience exhausted, before recourse was had to violence against our brothers?

Instead of that, we shut our eyes and clenched our fists. We denied that they were a nation either *de facto* or *de jure*. A remark wittier than wise, made by our quarter-master Bromley during the war to a Southern lady who was eloquently extolling the Confederacy as an ideal nation in contrast with the North, expressed the persistent nominal attitude of the Union authorities—"Permit me to suggest, madam, that the Southern nation which you so beautifully describe, is a mere *imagination!*" None of us, at the time, openly admitted the genuineness of that nationality; few of us frankly concede it to-day; perhaps some of us never will: but from the first all the South claimed it; most of them claim it to-day; probably many of them always will.

**The United States Political History*, Macmillan & Co., 1893, pp. 249, 282, 287, etc.

Because of our reverence for the laws and the Constitution, all of which we felt that the South had most wantonly violated, and of our belief that slavery and secession were utterly indefensible, and that therefore the South had no *right* to establish an independent existence, we denied the reality of that existence. When we found out our error, we were too proud to acknowledge it and too angry to recede.

If the principle be true that war, to be justifiable, must always be strictly defensive, never in the slightest degree aggressive; a shield, not a javelin; is it not evident that the States which remained loyal, and which still constituted the Union, should have restricted their efforts to warding off violent attacks? Ought we to have undertaken to compel the "wayward sisters" at the point of the bayonet to come back into the family? Did we not take a position untenable in morals when we entered upon a career of conquest and subjugation? Granting that we were justly indignant or even sublimely patriotic at heart, yet when we said to the citizens of the new country, "Submit, or die," were we not, in two senses of the term, *mad*? Should either an individual or a nation be quick to avenge a wrong?

But the Confederates were no better. They thought themselves patriots. They believed that their cause was just, and they were eager to fight for it. Each saw the other's mistake; neither, its own. So minded, both piously invoked the Prince of Peace, and then the opposing hosts began to kill each other at sight. At the moment of secession the United States was right; ever afterwards during the war, quite wrong. The Confederates were wrong at the outset, and ever afterwards till they surrendered at Appomattox.

A NATION *DE FACTO*.

Although it may seem to savor of prolixity, this matter is so important that we may be pardoned for dwelling on it a little longer.

We should have recognized the truth that they were a nation *de facto*. They should have recognized the truth that they were never a nation *de jure*. We ought not to have attempted military compulsion; they ought not to have resisted military compulsion. Each should have placed itself at the point of view of the other, and charitably giving full credit for sincerity, should have remembered that it is better for a man or a nation to suffer wrong than to do wrong. But the command, "Put up thy

sword again into his place," was unheard for the din of battle, the blare of bugles and the beat of drums. Deaf and blind, both trusted in God and gunpowder, lead and steel, muscle and grit.

It will be said that having begun to fight it was necessary to fight strenuously to a finish. It must be confessed that whether such instinct be human or brutish, angelic or devilish, as we are constituted, there is at first blush something splendid in such persistence. But upon second thought, it is clearly not manly; still less, godlike. It is the rule with bulldogs, gamecocks, gorillas, snakes, and beasts generally, including human brutes. But as Socrates demonstrates that it is "better to be refuted than to continue in error," so nothing is nobler than frankly to confess and forsake evil-doing; and there never was an hour during the war when it would not have been honorable for the North to withdraw its armies from Southern soil; never an hour when it would not have been honorable for the South to acknowledge that it made a mistake in quitting the Union, a mistake in constituting itself a new nation, and a mistake in refusing to submit to the old authority. Why not acknowledge the fact? Even feeble-minded duelists, when one of them has drawn blood, often declare their "honor" satisfied, and they part friends.

THE POINT OF HONOR.

Few may be disposed to concede that, as the Federal government was magnanimous after conquest, it would have been more magnanimous not to have attempted conquest at all. But all will allow that it was proper and honorable for General Lee and his subordinates to yield obedience to our national government at the end of the four-years' war. It is difficult to see why it would not have been equally so at any prior moment. Nay, it would have been vastly more appropriate and more honorable to have submitted long before; for voluntary acquiescence in rightful authority is ever more manly than extorted compliance; and countless miseries, shames, and horrors would have been averted. Did years of battle and butchery in any wise help matters? Did the sea of blood wash away the guilt of waging unnecessary and futile war? Is the tiger instinct altogether lovely when it impels one to battle to the death, even when warring against reason, against justice, against God?

That the North was blameworthy in not stopping sooner will be denied by those who superstitiously

measure merit by material prosperity ; as if success in maiming or strangling proved the Lord to be on our side ! We kept mercilessly closing in upon them with vast serpent coils of fire and steel till we triumphed. But does the crushing of bones or the choking into insensibility prove the anaconda more lovely than the tiger ?

THE LIFE OF THE NATION WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN
DESTROYED.

Let us clear away some of the remaining misapprehensions.

The question for the South always was, whether they should continue to be a nation. The question for the North never was whether *we* should continue to be a nation. True, it is often asserted — we have affirmed it ourselves — that we were fighting for life, that the existence of the Union was at stake, that if the South had finally prevailed, the nation would have gone all to pieces. On the contrary, is it not probable that the loyal States would soon have been more compact than ever ? Slavery having been substantially eliminated by the secession, there would have been no sufficient cause for further disintegration. The North would have continued a great republic, able to put two million soldiers into the field ; states united still, held together, consolidated by consanguinity, by precious memories, by a community of fundamental principles, laws, language, liberties, hopes, fears, the Christian religion ; by ties of friendship, by self-interest ; not mainly by force.

But suppose that a let-alone policy on the part of the North would certainly have been followed by a division of the old Union into two, three, ten, twenty independent nationalities. Better, far better such resumption of State sovereignty, such distribution of governmental authority, than the internecine war into which we angrily plunged. The dissevered States would soon have coalesced again, sisters in one family.

But the Constitution ! what of that ?

We were not battling to save the Constitution. As the great commoner, Thaddeus Stevens, leader of the House of Representatives, often declared, all through the war we were “travelling outside of the Constitution.” In the presence of “military necessity,” for four years the Constitution and laws were nowhere.

SLAVERY WOULD, IN ANY EVENT, HAVE PERISHED.

Nor were we, as some of us fondly believed, fighting to destroy slavery. Lincoln always stoutly denied such

a purpose. Emancipation was with him an afterthought, a last resort, a means, not an end. Whichever side should be victorious, slavery was doomed. If the South had succeeded, no fugitive thence would ever have been restored to his master. Soon the northern border of the Confederacy — Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas — denuded of slaves, would have become free soil; and South Carolina and the Gulf States, sensitive to public opinion, would not have held out long against the unanimous moral sentiment of the civilized world. Gradually and peacefully at length and perhaps very soon, the cancer would have been extirpated.

Had it really been intensely desired by our people to end slavery, for the existence and growth of which the North was as much to blame as the South, we could probably have accomplished that result by kindly and persistent effort without shedding a drop of blood. A sum of money equal to one fifth of the pecuniary loss caused by our Civil War would have sufficed to pay their masters more than twice the average market value of every black man, woman, and child. More than once, in 1862, Lincoln urged such action, but in vain.

THE SANGUINARY POLICY OF ATTRITION.

No; our end was not the abolition of slavery, but the speedy annihilation of the new government. We thought we could accomplish it by a few hard blows. Accordingly we employed not diplomacy, conciliation, moral suasion, entreaty, the just, liberal, equitable use of purchase money; but cavalry, infantry, artillery, ships of war, fire, famine, slaughter. And when the destruction of Southern commerce, the crippling of Southern industries, and the devastation of Southern fields failed to break down all resistance, the Washington government deliberately adopted the sanguinary policy of "attrition." The armies of the Southern nation must be ground to powder. The armed men must be killed off. To our brothers in gray the alternative presented was submission or extermination. At Cold Harbor, June 3, 1864, seven thousand Union soldiers and three thousand Confederates were shot down in thirty minutes. "If this is a fight of the Kilkenny cats," remarked General Grant, "it's a comfort to know that ours has the longest tail!"

Had the North stood wholly on the defensive, and not attempted to destroy the independence of the South by invasion and conquest, all we contended for would probably have been attained by peaceful means; for, as

their wisest statesman, their Vice-President, Alexander H. Stephens, assured us, the seceded States would eventually have returned to their allegiance. Had the South stood strictly on the defensive, and not pushed its armies into Maryland, Kentucky and Pennsylvania, its independence would at last have been recognized, and would have continued until it chose to come back in peace.

THE NET RESULT OF IT ALL.

And now, shutting our ears to the eloquent exaggerations of Memorial Day and the yet reverberating thunders of a thousand battles, what has been the net upshot of it all?

The Union has been re-established — *for a while*; but our victory, like the triumph of Cortes in Mexico and Pizarro in Peru, proving nothing but physical superiority, did not so touch the consciences of the Southern people, did not so fill their hearts with love for their conquerors, did not so sanctify in their souls the principle of unity, as to insure against all possible future attempts at disruption. A distinguished Southern gentleman, our college classmate, a colonel on the staff of Jefferson Davis, William Preston Johnston, President of Tulane University, widely known and everywhere honored, intimately acquainted with men and measures throughout the South, wrote us eight years ago — “I know of no man in the South who has changed his opinion as to the rightfulness of our cause during the Civil War, unless it was for his *advantage* to change it.” All but unanimous as Southern men and women still are in the conviction that their cause was just and ours unjust, what would prevent them from trying the issue again, should changed circumstances appear to make it for their interest and to guarantee success?

Slavery is nominally gone, and with it the kindly feeling between master and servant; but an alarming race hatred that did not exist before has sprung up, and a determination to keep the negro down. As is natural where human beings are slaughtered like cattle by the thousand, our reverence for man as man seems everywhere to have diminished; and our foolish conceit of superiority to black, brown, red and yellow men, and poor whites of foreign nationalities, appears to increase. This thought gives rise to painful reflections.

To what shall we attribute the disposition, more apparent, we trust, than real, to excuse injustice by pointing to business prosperity; to gloss over iniquity by

alleging subsequent righteousness, to justify, if they exist,* lying and treachery, torture and massacre, havoc and devastation, imprisonment and starvation of non-combatants, by showing that such inflictions were kindly meant to "make the enemy want peace and want it badly;" to impute our sins to Divine Providence, fondly persuading ourselves that "it is the Lord's doing," and "we must not shrink from our just responsibilities"?

CAUSE OF THE PRESENT DRIFT INTO MILITARISM.

If, as many allege, there exists in some quarters a craze for military glory and naval supremacy; a superstition that degrades our glorious flag into a miserable fetish; an adoption of the God-defying motto, "Our country, right or wrong!" an ambition to have our republic, armed to the teeth, strut like a turkey cock among the nations and dominate land and sea; a warping and twisting, belittling, ignoring, or defying of the United States Constitution; or an easy political virtue that forsakes the guide of our nation's youth and forgets the covenants of our fathers' God, scouting the underlying principles of Liberty and the essence of Christianity, to coquette and wanton with imperial despotism — to what shall we ascribe all these ominous tendencies more than to that tremendous struggle into which we plunged with unthinking haste, and which, first and last, in battle or by disease or hardships, shortened the lives of a million brave men, draped in mourning three million firesides, filled with "curses not loud but deep" ten million hearts, and flung away twenty thousand million dollars?

All this ostensibly and in good faith, to save the Union, maintain the Constitution, and destroy slavery! We meant well. "But the pity of it! oh, the pity of it!" Could not statesmanship, forbearance, patience and charity have found a better way than that?

We had no Hague Tribunal then; but we might have heard and heeded the golden words of the great Irish liberator, the illustrious O'Connell, echoing the voice of the Master — "No political change is worth a single crime, or, above all, the shedding of a single drop of human blood!"

HOMER B. SPRAGUE.

NEWTON, MASS.

* Let us be slow to admit that our soldiers have been guilty of "marked severities." But if forced to believe it, let us remember that, as General Bell announced to his troops, "the severest measures are the most humane!" Joshua's campaigns of extermination were perhaps the most merciful ever waged! They "shortened the war" and secured permanent peace! Our President has declared — and we wish to believe it — "Our soldiers are the most humane in the world." Half a million to a million non-combatants have perished in Luzon, and we have slain in battle fifty thousand of their fighting men; but our intentions were good! We must have peace, even if to secure it we have to "make a solitude!"



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